

# The Clipper Visits Nancy Glass

By MADDIE MERRIFIELD

It was a charming, old-fashioned country scene: the rambling white clapboard house, its porch leaning slightly under the weight of wisteria vines; the huge, dark barn, sagging, framed in brilliant autumn foliage; a black cat posing on a weathered fencepost; a timeworn hand pump close to the back door.

Inside, the crackling fire in the old Crawford woodstove quickly eliminated the shivers of a nippy October afternoon. A kitten, purring contentedly, curled itself on a braided mat in a nearby chair. Over the kitchen table with its red and white tablecloth, hung an antique oil lamp, its glass shade edged with teardrop prisms. Wood from a huge spruce "that went down in a storm a few years back," was stacked neatly on the wide floorboards and heavy beams lined the ceiling in this house which dates back to 1767.

The second oldest house on High St. in Duxbury, it is the home of Nancy Glass and her brother, John MacFarlane. Nancy and her family moved to the house from London, Ontario, in 1918, on Nancy's 14th birthday; 63 years later, the house is full of the memories of a lifetime.



Nancy Glass

Nancy may look like she fits right into the old-fashioned scene -- her white hair pinned up and her warm sweater buttoned close over her cotton dress -- but she is hardly old-fashioned.

So concerned about the rising cost of energy and the need for using natural resources, she has applied for a permit to erect an 80-foot windmill on the cleared land next to the house to generate electricity. The windmills of yesteryear are coming back into vogue as a modern-day energy alternative, and Nancy Glass is thinking about the future.

Her idea for the windmill has been brewing for quite a while. Several years ago as oil prices climbed higher and higher, Nancy saw an ad in the paper for a heat pump, which could heat a house if there were a good water supply. The company came to the property and drilled 2 wells about 200 yards from the house which, together, can produce 15 gallons of water a minute.

Down in the dirt-floor cellar, its walls lined with jars of homemade tomato juice, Nancy explained the workings of the heating system. Next to the oil furnace, which can still be used as a back-up heat source, was the new heat pump. It pumps water from the 2 wells, heats it electrically, sends the heat through the heating ducts and the water into the old well, over which stands the picturesque hand pump. But the wells are far from the house and with rising electricity costs, she began to think of generating her own electricity by wind power.

She wrote to several companies for information on windmills and last January wrote to Don Kent, WBZ's weatherman, asking him for a recommendation. He sent his son down to talk to Nancy and in July he arrived himself to survey the property, "a perfect site," he said for the windmill he recommended -- an Aerolite. Don Kent tried to get a permit for Nancy, but since the windmill they needed had to be 80 feet tall to get enough wind, he was unsuccessful. There are special regulations for a structure over 60 feet and Nancy is awaiting a hearing of the appeals board on Nov. 12.

"The 12 blades of the windmill are laminated wood, so they won't interfere with anyone's TV or radio reception," said her brother John, and they could foresee no reason why abutters would object.

"It's been many years since Duxbury has had a windmill," said Nancy, "though they were plentiful on Powder Point and Standish Shore in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Windmills back then pumped water into tanks in the attic or barn, but after the town laid its water mains, the windmills gradually disappeared."

The 750-lb. windmill which Nancy wants to have erected has 3 blades attached to a generator atop a 3-legged free-standing steel tower. It begins generating electricity when the wind speed is 8 mph and automatically shuts down at 40 mph. The windmill wiring runs underground and is plugged into an outlet such as one used for an electric stove. The elec-

tricity generated is fed directly into the house, and is automatically subtracted from that supplied by the utility company. If the windmill produces more electricity than needed, the excess power is fed back to the utility company, to the credit of the windmill owner.

The windmill needs a 9-foot concrete base, and once it is hardened, the windmill can be erected and ready to go in 2 days. Though the initial cost is considerable, there are good tax credits for energy conservation and utility costs become minimal. "In 1977 we sold 10 acres of our property to the town for conservation land. They were happy to get that land because it contained the headwaters of Keene Brook. We decided to use the money from that sale to buy the windmill -- from one conservation project to the next," said Nancy.

"So with the windmill, the heat pump, the oil furnace and the woodstove, we ought never to be cold!" she laughed. "The old kitchen woodstove bakes good, too, even though you can't regulate the heat. When I bake bread and the oven gets too hot, I just stick a wedge in the door to keep the bread from burning. I put all the wood ash in our little garden, along with some old hay, and we've never needed fertilizer. Last year when we did the soil tested, it was perfect. We grew 120 butternut squashes, lots of tomatoes for juice, beets, carrots and Swiss chard that will last 'til Christmas."



Nancy Glass, her mother and 4 brothers sit on the steps of their High St. home in 1918.

Nancy attended Parkin School and graduated from Duxbury's F. B. Bridge Academy in 1923. She later graduated from Perry Normal School in Boston.

In 1929 her brother was in the post office one day and heard the postmaster talk about giving up his position. The post office was then located across from the West Duxbury Methodist Church down the street. When Nancy heard the news, she went to the post office and was sworn in that day as the new postmaster. Her front parlor was converted to the West Duxbury post office, 4th class, the smallest.

"We may have been a small post office, but we had 2 deliveries in and 2 out every day," said Nancy. They served 25 families and people often came twice a day to check their mail, the young folks waiting on the porch for a delivery, neighbors exchanging the latest news around the woodstove."

Nancy hand-stamped the mail and had to record all canceled mail, writing it down every day in a big book. At Christmas there was a great flurry and much excitement in the little post office -- "our busiest season. We had lots of newspapers, too," said Nancy, "the Post, the Globe, the Record American, and then, of course, the Sears Catalogs came through the mail." Penny postcards and 2- or 3-cent stamps were the costs back then, "and for quite a stretch, too."

Nancy's post office was closed in 1958. There were many requests from the stamp collectors for last-day postmarks, rubber-stamped by Nancy. She sold the box racks to a man who "prettied them up and used

them as a room divider," but she still has the old counter over which passed 29 years of good news, bad news, junk mail and love letters. The West Duxbury post office no longer exists, but it is part of Duxbury's history and a warm memory to all it served.

The day after the post office was closed, Nancy was transferred to a Pembroke post office. In 1960 she married John Glass and retired -- but only from the postal position. She converted the front room parlor into a real estate office and kept herself busy. Mr. Glass died in 1972.

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The kettle hissed on the stove -- it was time for tea. Nancy had reminisced about her past adventures and talked eagerly about the future. There is a stake sticking out of the ground beyond the garden where the cornstalks hang yellowed and dried. It is the proposed spot for what Nancy hopes will be her next adventure. The question is hanging in the air and the answer is blowing in the wind.

On every side we hear about saving energy. The kitchen stove and the parlor stove reappear in houses. Wood and coal replace gas and electricity. Will windmills return to the landscape?

Do you remember when windmills clattered and squeaked all over Duxbury? It was a long time ago, but I remember it as a child. Many houses had their own windmill, and woe betide a windless Monday. No washing was done.

The Persians had the first windmills. Their machines were built by attaching sails to center posts to be whirled around horizontally by wind from any direction like horses on a carousel.

In northern Europe, millwrights obtained more power from the wind than Persians had. Those sails rose and fell, but had to be kept facing the direction from which the wind came and had to be furled when the wind became ferocious. This was managed by revolving whole millhouses on posts. These were called post mills.

Smock mills were developed long ago when only the caps had to be turned to redirect the sail when the wind veered. Smock mills could be taller and plainer than post mills. Some have been well preserved on America's eastern seaboard.

Rotors with many more blades than European windmills were invented in the United States in the 1860s. Factories in the midwestern states built and sold millions of these "pinwheels on stilts" until about half a century ago. It was these windmills that were used in Duxbury.

Dutch windmills were synonymous with Holland. There is one at the Heritage Plantation in Sandwich and another in Newport, R.I. The first windmill in Massachusetts ground corn for housewives between Watertown and Harvard College.

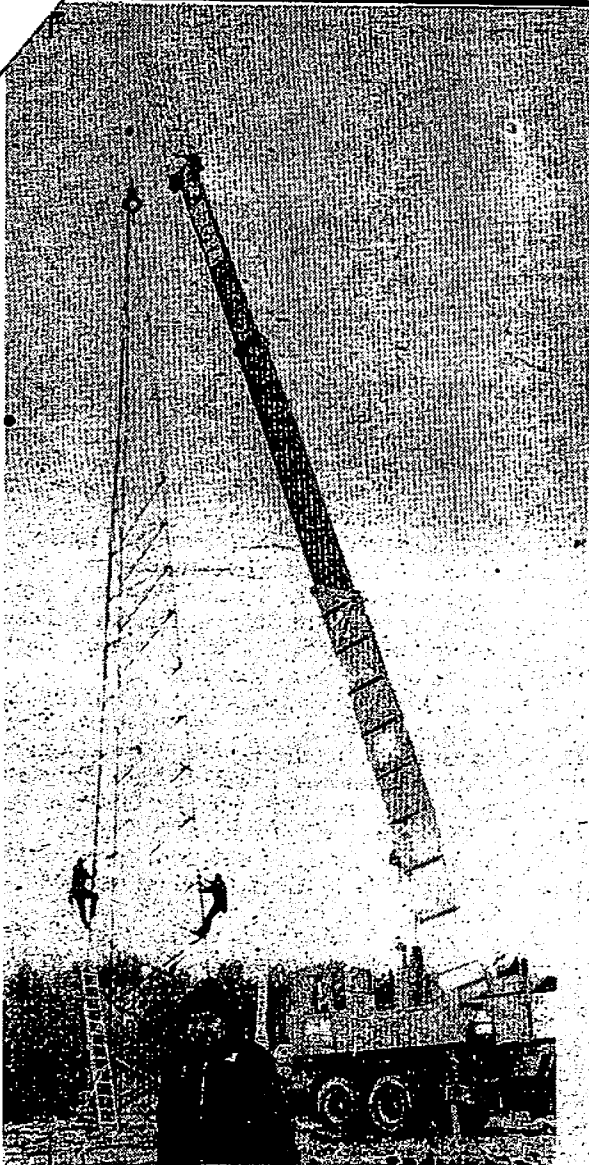
Until energy shortages began to frighten Americans, many had belittled windmills as too primitive. Now the government and private companies have invested huge sums in nuclear plants. At Princeton University a new kind of wind wheel began to generate electricity in 1970.

It may be that the windmill will be as helpful as it was in Holland in the 16th century and on our Great Plains in the 19th. Windmills may be used again to save energy -- to turn millstones, pump water and generate electricity.

The Carl Roths of Plymouth have a windmill that generates their electricity and pays two-thirds of their electric bill. Shall we see windmills in Duxbury again?



The home of Nancy Glass used as the West Duxbury post office for 29 years. The photo was taken in 1918 and the house looks just the same today.



Windmill being erected in Nancy Glass's yard.



Friends, relatives and neighbors watch the process with Nancy, far right.

### Windy Mac

Windy Mac, the windmill,  
Is steady on her course,  
She rides the sky triumphantly  
To reduce her cost.

We do not know, we cannot tell  
How strong the wind will blow,  
As Dame Mother Nature  
Decides the way to go.

Photos by Deni Johanson.

But we do know and we can tell  
As her graceful blades revolve,  
Her power will enter in  
And our energy bills resolve.

Energy, clean and prosperous,  
To gladden every day,  
What better way to salute the world  
On this Valentine's Day.

--Nancy Glass